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VOLUME I.



JIMMY DELANY, OR THE ASCENDANT IDEA.

"A MERRY morning to Father Connellan! Well, I dare north, south, east, and west, of our sweet county of Wexford, to produce such another comfortable domicile as this of your reverence; and the proof that it is so in every respect, is, that master, man, dog, cat, cow, and horse, have the same sleek sides and sleek looks. I wish I could say as much for some of the poor parsons." "Alack! alack!" sighed Father Connellan in a lachrymose tone, "you speak of what we *were* rather than what we *are*. Poor things! neither biped nor quadruped *here* carries the same port as formerly. Now, how can you speak of sleek sides and sleek cheeks to me?—to me? Take another glance at me: fancy me with a pink jacket and black cap, and am I not just the cut, weight, and girth for a jockey? 'Ah! what a falling off is *here*,'" pointing to a paunch that he asserted, with serio-comic phiz, was lamentably diminished.

"Oh, most lamentably!" cried I, entering into his humour. "Bless me! what is the matter? Oh, thou *poor, poor* disciple of holy mother church! black was the fast indeed that hath reduced thee to this pickle!"

"*Black* it has been more than once, sure enough," returned the priest, laughing; "and as I am a christianable man, this

strict Lent has been for the sins and follies of *others*, and not for my own. But you shall know all." Then raising his voice, he called, "Jimmy! Jimmy Delany!"

Thrice he shouted, and was still unanswered. "Ay," continued his reverence, shaking his head and turning up his eyes, "this is the cut! Job's boils and blisters were nothing to this! I may call and call, and have nothing but the echo of my own voice for my pains. Once more I'll try, and if he doesn't come then"—and, placing his mouth close to the wall, he sang out, "Jimmy Delany!" so tremendously loud, that the delinquent must have heard it at half a mile's distance. At this fourth summons, shuffling, lagging steps faltered up the hall, the parlour door opened, and the anatomy of a man presented itself—

So faint, so spiritless,
So dull, so dead in look, so woe begone.

While gazing on him, I thought that if such a man were to "draw my curtains in the dead of night," he need not cry out "fire!" to appal me.

"Well, Misther Delany," began Father Connellan, "since you have condescended to appear—(why don't you make your obeisance, sirrah?—draw back your shovel foot, bob

forward your great mop-head, and bow to the lady—soh, that will do)—be pleased to explain how and why I, your spiritual pastor and lawful master, am reduced to half my natural dimensions, ‘clipt of my fair proportions.’ As some one says”——

But ere the priest could proceed with his quotation, I broke in with an exclamation of amazement.

“That spectre—plump, grinning, mutton-headed Jimmy Delany! who used to wish for a gold chain but long enough to encircle the *disc* of his face twice, and it would be as long as the chain of my lord mayor of Dublin? Impossible! No, no! Reverend father, you may make me believe much; you are a man of mystery and mirth, potent and pleasant; but you will hardly bring me to believe that *that* shadow represents my plump and good-humoured old acquaintance Jimmy Delany.” “I have my doubts too,” said his reverence.

All this time the ghost-like subject of our observations stood mute and motionless, gazing at me with lack-lustre eyes, in which there was no beam of recognition. Indeed, he seemed dubious of his own identity; for when I refused to acknowledge him, he passed his hand deliberately and cautiously over his face and person, much in the way a blind man would do; and it was a considerable time before he ventured to assert “that he *was* Jimmy Delany still—if not in flesh and blood, at laist in skin and bone.”

“Alas! and has it come to this with thee, Jimmy? I recognise thy voice, though somewhat tremulous and less stentorian than of old, and I would fain inquire for what unheard of crime has this severe penance been imposed upon thee?—the direst that the dire church can inflict, it must have been! Hast thou made a pilgrimage with *unboiled* peas in your shoes, my poor, poor Jimmy?”

“Speak, sirrah!” cried the priest.

“Must I tell the *truth*, sur?” asked the spectre, reddening, and scratching his head in a dilemma.

At this juncture I perceived that the person appealed to could hardly command gravity to answer the important query addressed to him, and, but that a fit of coughing came to his aid, alas for the decorum of Father Connellan!

“You are a good boy, Jimmy,” said his reverence with becoming sedateness, when the teasing cough had subsided; “a very good boy to apply to me ere you answered a question under circumstances which induce you to conceal the truth if you could. But, my poor, poor fellow, as I have said and thundered forth a hundred times from the pulpit, *TRUTH* should be spoken at all times, however painful to us; and it is especially necessary on this occasion, as I perceive a something like a fling at the discipline of our church; because, forsooth, you have dwindled from a mould four to a farthing candle! Tell the truth and shame the *devil*.”

Thus admonished, with a desperate effort poor Jimmy proceeded to inform me that the cause of all his woe and waste of flesh was “Betsy Kelly, an’ the urchin!”—Here he stuck fast, and I waited in vain for the finishing of the sentence. I next looked to the merry priest for an explanation, but I found that it was equally fruitless to expect one from him then. He had fallen back in his chair, in a fit of (to me inexplicable) laughter; and the confused Delany, still more confounded, took the opportunity to escape from the room, saying, as he retreated, “I’ll lave it all to his rivirine!—let him tell what he will—I won’t deny it.” “A fair stage for a fertile imagination, Father Connellan?” said I.

“Egad, there is no occasion for a fertile imagination in *this* case,” he replied. “Too true it is that the drama of every-day life surpasses that exhibited on the stage. Now, here is my poor Jimmy—*fiddle-string*! I may call him, because I play upon him daily, and he is almost reduced to one. If an actor ever so clever were to show off his blunders and absurdities on the stage, he’d be pelted to a mummy, or hooted into a coal-hole for the rest of his days, for attempting (mind) to impose on a discerning public with an outrageous caricature of nature.

Baithershin! let them come to Father Connellan’s cabin for a week, and I’ll promise them more amusement for *nothing* than they could get at the theatre in a year, and pay dearly for it. But the farce is drawing to a conclusion now.”

“Farce, call you it? My good sir, to look at poor Jimmy, I should suppose he has been enacting a very deep tragedy indeed, and that the bowl or dagger must end it.”

“Or a marl-hole, or his garters,” said his reverence laughing! “But is it possible,” continued he, “that you have not dived into the mystery yet? Is it possible that I, a poor se-

cluded priest, dead to the world these twenty years, minding nothing but my breviary, the souls of my flock, the Pope’s bulls, and—and an occasional beef-steak and glass of punch, was up to the secret in a trice, while you, a gay member of society, are still in the dark? What direful, by me unmentionable disease, doth these four ugly, sinful capitals spell, L, O, V, E?”

“Love!—Ha! ha! ha! So Jimmy, poor Jimmy, is a lover! ‘Oh, Cupid, thou *urchin*,’ as thy woe-begone disciple calls thee, thou wert not blind; but *blind-folded*; thou stole a peep, and the barbed dart that rankles in the heart of poor Jimmy was directed with laughter-loving malice!”

“Pray tell me, reverend Father, was the heroine—for heroine she must have been, to have achieved such a victory over dullness—a living woman? or did she smite him through the pages of a book? for I recollect his reading mania at one time.”

“Arm yourself with the seven-fold fence of patience for half an hour, and I shall tell you all I know of the matter. But I must begin with the beginning, according to the method of all story-tellers. Now, a pinch of Lundy, a preliminary hem! and here goes:—

“About five years come Michaelmas, I buried my old house-keeper Nell Gray—I was going to say with military honours, for she was quite a *trooper* of a woman—but with the honours due to a faithful deserving servant which she was, and a treasure in a family, especially for dressing beef-steaks. But as I saw even in her a good deal of the tricks of the sex (excuse me), I was determined to have no more womenkind about me. I therefore set about searching for a good, quiet lad, who would be tractable enough to learn to do all the ordinary work of the house; and my wishes being made known to my flock, boys of all ages and sizes soon clustered about me like sparrows round a wheat stack. Out of twenty-five ‘cute-looking chaps, I chose our friend Jimmy Delany, to the rapturous delight of his mother, a widow, who, as she brought her precious son to me, with a shining Sunday face, and a clean shirt—or at least a collar—assured me that though ‘her Jimmy was the laist taste slow at takin’ up the larnin’, yit wanst he got a houlit ov it, it was he that would take the houlit in airnest!’

‘Very well,’ said I, ‘he is slow, but sure; the very sort I want. Your quick people forget as soon as they learn.’

Well, Jimmy entered on his service, and, egad, ere the first day closed, I found that his mother had told truth to the letter! He was ‘slow,’ sure enough, and it was equally true that the houlit he took was a ‘houlit in airnest;’ but the pertinacious ‘houlit’ was a hold of any eatable that fell in his way, for he was a furious eater—God bless us! By and bye, I found out more of Jimmy’s perfections, and I lauded my sagacity in having discovered and appropriated such a treasure. ‘Happy old parish priest!’ ejaculated I in an ecstasy, ‘thou hast but one servitor in this teeming world, and the head of that chosen attendant admits but of one isolated idea for a time, which ‘idea,’ be it never so extravagant, rules his urains, words, and actions, as certainly and despotically as the moon rules the tides!’

Into that head, by dint of hammering at it day and night, his mother had instilled the ‘idea’ that he was to renounce his old habits, playmates, and plays, as surely as he was to fling away his old clothes, and henceforth to think of nothing but of being a faithful diligent man-of-all-works to his reverence the priest. In fine, in words suited to his capacity, he was told that he was to forget the idle gorseon, and to put on the sarvint boy. For a week this song was sung to him in a variety of tones, without producing any other effect on Jimmy than causing a grin. At last, ‘Ov all works, mother?’ quoth he. ‘Bedad I thinks I’ll have somethin’ to do. Howsom-dever, since I *must* be a sarvint, why it’s best to begin.’ And thenceforward he laid his whole soul to the task; and so earnest and anxious was he, that in little more than three months he could do a few things decently without having me perpetually pinned to his tail, and in a year he went through the routine of household affairs without a blunder, not one thought or wish interfering with his business. Like the churning-horse of my neighbour Giles, he plodded over the dull ground allotted for him without grumbling, and without being conscious that any other mode of life might produce equal happiness. Happy being! contented, stolid Jimmy Delany!

Things were going on thus smoothly with master and man, while the mother was inwardly and outwardly fretting. She expected by this time that her boy was taking a short cut

towards being a learned man, if not a *janius* all out; and great was her dismay when she heard the truth! So she comes to me with her humble petition 'that I would be pleased to enlighten her gorsoun's brains.' 'I fear that is what no mortal can do,' said I, 'but I will do my best for him.' Indeed, I was attached to the creature, and I thought it my duty to endeavour to stretch his capacity if I could; and, accordingly, I bought a Primer, and set him to learn his letters. Oh! it was the unfortunate moment that I did so! From that hour the man has never been himself; the four walls of my quiet house have been eternally frightened with strange sounds; and I have never had a comfortable meal since. A new 'idea' displaced the old one:—'he was no longer a *sarvint*, but a *schollard*;' business was nearly suspended; and when strong custom, or my stronger reproofs, so far prevailed that he could not help going over the most urgent of the household employments, it was not with even-handed justice; for, let the left hand be occupied as it might, the right was sure to clutch the book; so that every day and every hour he might be taken for a clumsy leaden personification of Knowledge extending the volume to the uninitiated, till the strange sounds issuing from the blubber lips destroyed the illusion.

These strange sounds were first heard when he had surmounted the Alps of the alphabet, and attacked the A, B, *abs*; and from morning till night I could obtain no reply to any question I asked him, without having a string of *abs* and *obs* tacked to it, till my brains and patience could scarce bear the repetition. Soon after, still sailing away on the stream of learning, that notable piece of literature the 'Read-a-made-aisy' got into his hands, of which he made such excellent use, that in a few days he could append a sort of poetical illustration to his replies, according as my queries were shaped, and sometimes he let fly a squib at me through their medium. I'll give you a sample of our colloquies:—

'Ah, then, Jimmy, did you shoot any birds this morning?' 'One big fella, sur, choke-full ov the currans,' quoth Jimmy, bringing in as chorus, 'A was an archer that shot at a frog.'

'Well, what shall we have for dinner to-day, Jimmy?'

'*Mait* to be sure, sur—B was a butcher that kept a big dog.'

'Right, Jimmy, well thought of! Down with you as fast as you can to Doyle the butcher's, and see what meat he has got. I think our friend the constable will dine with me to-day.'

'I will, sur,' said Jimmy. 'C was a captain all covered with lace.'

'And,' continued I, 'as my dinner wont be very splendid, and I'm sure to have it very vilely cooked, I'll bring forth a bottle or two of my *supernaculum*—the rale mountain dew.'

'Ay, ay, sur,' responds Jimmy. 'D was a drunkard that had a red face.'

There was a good hit of stupidity! By the staff of St Patrick, the patron of drunkards, it was the keenest cut I ever received in my life, and the innocence with which it was spoken gave it double effect. I fairly blushed, and dropped my face over my breast like a great bursting peony whose stalk is too weak to support it. Ah! my friend, happy would I have been to endure those little embarrassments—however unbecoming for me to blush—did I foresee the losses, crosses, confusions and confusions which followed in the train of this comet, and which I might have expected, for I partly concur in the old opinion that the fiery prodigies of the heavens prognosticate dire disasters to man; and the eccentric course of this 'hairy star' in this little world of mine called Ballygrish was equally portentous. But hitherto he had kept within bounds. So long as he believed himself the *schollard* and I the *schoolmaster*, he conducted himself according to the belief; and the most fault-finding teacher could not complain of Jimmy's want of diligence. Indeed, he rehearsed his lesson much oftener than necessary, in season and out of season, in bed and out of bed, and that in such a thundering tone, that I told him his constant petition to 'hear him his task' was unnecessary, as I always 'heard' him sufficiently well, though stone walls were betwixt us. But once he became independent of an instructor, once he was quit of my assistance, I do assure you severe chastisement was frequently necessary to restrain his lunacies, and I much wonder how his skull bore the thumps and cracks which from day to day I was obliged to inflict, in lieu of shaving and blistering, to moderate the brain fever of the imagination—of 'the ascendant idea.'

I put up with various annoyances and inconveniences with admirable patience and temper, and which I shall not now stop to particularize; but one affair I cannot pass over, as it made a haul on my purse, and I'll relate it.

Just about the time that he set up to study for himself, I was much in want of a pair of new *inexpressibles*. My velveteens were much the worse for wear, and I was determined to have a bran-new pair for the ensuing Sunday. So I sent, very thoughtlessly indeed, the said student Jimmy Delany with an order to Bryan the tailor to get the requisite stuff at a certain shop. Unfortunately I did not specify any particular colour or material, thinking naturally that all the world knew the colours and materials fitting for clergymen; but the shopkeeper and tailor—neither very much wiser than my messenger, I fancy—were quite astray, and in their dilemma they applied to my man-of-all-works for information. Alas! they knew little of poor Jimmy. They knew not that he was then under the dominion of 'one idea'—that he was a learned *schollard*, and not a *sarvint*.

Now be it known to you that his then study was the Universal Spelling Book (I believe he had it in his pocket at the time), in which is the story of the town in danger of being besieged. The mason, the currier, and the carpenter, give their opinion as to the best method of fortifying it, and each, of course, with an eye to self-interest. The mason recommends stone, the carpenter oak, and the currier leather.

Well, at the instant of the shopkeeper's and tailor's deliberations on my wearables, Jimmy stood at the shop-door, staring up and down the street, as far as it was in his ken; and when the tailor appealed to him to know 'what sort of inexpressibles did his master order,' honest Jimmy, thinking but of the 'town in danger of being besieged,' answered in the words of the currier, 'take my word for it, there is nothing like leather.'

'Leather!' echoed the shopkeeper.

'Leather!' screamed the tailor.

'Ay,' repeated Jimmy decidedly, 'there is nothing like leather!'

Well! patience is a virtue. Were it not that the gentle spirit had made my half-starved frame her tabernacle, I should have been a tenant for Bedlam on the succeeding Saturday night, when the rascal Bryan brought himself and his green bag, with a sort of grin, into my parlour, and untying it, shook out before my amazed eyes a dashing pair of—you shall hear *what*, presently.

'They're a very neat piece of work, Bryan,' said I, examining them without much interest, thinking they could not possibly be for me; 'they seem to be well seamed and stitched for aught I know, and I only hope for your sake that they will fit him for whom you have made them.'

'I hope so too, sur,' quoth the tailor, smirking complacently. 'Be pleased to thry them on sur, an' I'll engage they'll fit to the peelin' ov an ingin.'

'Pooh, pooh,' returned I, good humouredly, still in the dark, 'what use in my trying them on? Indeed, if they had come in my way thirty years ago, and the red *rogue* in full chase, I wouldn't say but I'd pop them on, priest or no priest; but now there's no use in talking about them. Hand me out the velvets, and let me try them on.'

'The velvets, yer rivirince?'

'Ay, the velvets, Sir Tailor; and I hope those you bring me now are roomier than the last pair.'

'Oh, faix, sur,' cried the fellow, still shaking the *unmentioned unmentionables* at me, 'those are roomy enough in all conscience, for I thought as how you wouldn't like them *quite* to the skin.' And there he stood, holding forth his wearables, and expatiating in their praise; and there I stood expecting my velvets—but in vain! I caught up the bag, and turning it inside out, I found I had nothing more to expect—those forbidden ones were for ME!

'What colour are these in day-light?' asked I, in that still calm that precedes the tempest.

'An iligant yellow, sur!' responded the stitcher with alacrity, his countenance brightening with hope.

'And thou vile fraction of a man!' thundered I in full storm, and darting a withering scowl that almost put the little animal into the earth, 'hast thou no more reverence for thy church than that, to suit thy petty interests, thou wouldst see thy venerable parish priest, of seventy-six, figure in a pair of yellow buckskin breeches, like a huntsman or postilion? Away with them, sirrah, or by the soul of your grandmother in purgatory—where she shall stay those hundred years for your assurance—these same breeches shall case your own diminutive limbs to-morrow, and you placed upon the altar as an exhibition, with *Tally-ho!* in capitals upon your back. What a beautiful spectacle for the congregation!'

Soon I had the dismayed sticher upon his knees, deprecating my wrath, and recounting the particulars I have already related in explanation; ending with 'my backward blessing on Jimmy Delany!' intending of course that all my ire should fall upon the real delinquent. And so it would, but that there is something in the very name 'Jimmy Delany' that invariably mollifies me. I knew he did nothing out of malice or mischief, but from the greatest simplicity; and when I demanded to see the book he was then busy with, and his thumb marks pointing to the 'town in danger of being besieged, I was at home in the matter at once. But I had to pay for the leather, and the tailor for making the breeches, which I lost afterwards at a game of backgammon with Squire Hooligan.

About a month afterwards, a nephew of mine, a midshipman, came on a visit to me, bringing with him some volumes of Cook's Voyages. These books seemed to have a fascinating charm for him, but it was nothing to the charm they had for Mister Delany. It was downright idolatry—he knelt to them, I believe—I know he slept with them, ate with them, and drank with them, and finally became so incorporated with the work—he was its hero! Yes! all the old 'ruling passions' were clean forgotten, and Captain Cook was lord of the ascendant. Oh! how the young seaman laughed, and roared, and flung himself on the ground again and again, in ecstasies of mirth, when he discovered what a jewel of a shipmate Providence had provided for him in an old priest's house in the country, where he had expected little but long faces and long fasts!—how he kicked up his heels in all the obstreperousness of a sailor's joy! Still the ludicrous perfections of my poor Jimmy unfolded themselves—still his matchless simplicity, his inconceivable infatuation under the dominion of the new 'idea,' became apparent! And no wonder; for surely his wholesale assumption of the renowned navigator, his pompous action, and conversations in character, and the total and absolute oblivion of all former ties and duties, altogether were enough to raise laughter under the ribs of Death, and was almost too much for the living. If I asked him, after several hours' daily absences, where he had been, his prompt reply would be, 'at New Zealand,' or 'Otaheite.' And if I begged to know what he had been doing in these favoured places, I was instantly told, 'getting in a supply of fresh water and provisions for the ship's company,' and this with an earnestness of look and manner absolutely irresistible. 'So, so,' I would then say, convinced of the infatuation, and letting things take their course, 'I perceive I have got the illustrious Captain Cook in my house. I thought the great man had disappeared from earth long ago; but in this age of miracles, either through the power of steam, or a galvanic battery, here he is again, and I must make his stay as agreeable as possible. Pray be seated, captain; and if not too much trouble, I would be delighted to hear some of your adventures.'

Down would Jimmy seat himself, and out would come a fluent description of the different places he had 'touched at,' the customs and manners of the different islands, the ferocious looks of some savages, and the gentle countenances of others; the birds, beasts, fruits, flowers, &c. &c.; and I do declare to you I desired no higher entertainment. For whole hours would I sit listening to him; and the captain, gratified by my attention, and utterly unconscious of anything ludicrous, continued from day to day to pour forth his wonderful discoveries for my amusement.

Meanwhile I missed a fine bathing-tub, a fine spacious fellow, in which I could float as comfortably as in a little lake. I made various inquiries about it, but could hear nothing of it. I even spoke of it in the chapel, but all to no purpose. However, one day as I was returning from seeing a sick person, I came upon an unfrequented path that led by the side of a large and deep marl-hole, about half a mile from my house; and as I got on a height over it, what should I see but my bathing-tub floating majestically on the water, a pole stuck up in the middle, with a red handkerchief by way of a flag, and a person seated at one end with another pole for steering! With half an eye I saw who it was, and I took measures accordingly. I alighted from my horse, and, getting behind a clump of ash-trees, quite unnoticed by the navigator, who was enjoying the fineness of the day, I gathered up all the large stones I could find into a heap beside me, and, taking deliberate aim, I let fly two or three huge ones at the stern, in which the captain was seated. At the first assault he started, and looked about in every direction, quite thunderstricken and alarmed; at the second volley, as none of them had hit himself as yet, he shouted in character, 'The natives! the natives are upon us!'

and began to paddle with might and main for shore; but as the stones flew thicker and faster, hopping off his head and shoulders, whacking, banging, cracking at all sides of him, he lost all self-command, dropped his oar, and finally, in floundering about, and starting from one end to the other, in his confusion to avoid the stones, the boat turned keel upwards, and the captain disappeared to the bottom, yelling all sorts of 'murder!' And I can assure you, my gentleman forgot all ideas but that plain Jimmy Delany was on the point of being smothered, and no sailor with a shark in his wake ever showed more dexterity. Nobly did he buffet and plunge, and kick and puff for his life, till he got to dry land, where I was ready to receive him.

'Are you safe, captain?' inquired I in a tone of much commiseration.

'Och, masther jewel!' quoth Jimmy ruefully, his teeth chattering between fright and cold, 'I never was so near death in my life! I was well-nigh smothered between the eels and the mud at the bottom of that curst marl-hole!'

'Ah! my Jimmy,' observed I pathetically, 'we should never meddle with unknown elements. See how uncertain is the life of a sailor!—one moment floating majestically on the bosom of the ocean, and the next at the bottom with the fishes.'

'Thru for ye, masthur darlint!' replied my man, *once more my man*; and home I drove my man before me, covered with mud, as if he was preparing a cast of his beautiful person; and so efficacious were the stoning, the ducking, my lecture, and the shouts of laughter his appearance raised amongst the workmen and neighbours, that I had soon the pleasure to see him return to his original 'idea' that he was 'savin' man to the priest,' and become undividedly attentive.

But I believe this life is to be one of change and crosses. No sooner had I sat myself down with the hope of peace and ease for the rest of my days, than there comes another, and the greatest of all annoyances, the more so that it was totally unexpected. No! I never dreamt that Jimmy Delany would become a lover! and when I did become aware of the state of affairs, I was as much a stricken deer as himself—paralyzed, bewildered what to do or say under the circumstances.

I will not trouble you with a detail of the first symptoms I observed, nor a description of the many outrageous blunders he committed under the influence of this worst of all 'ideas' but one—and here it is:—

It was on a Thursday: I had ordered a beef-steak for dinner. You know it is my favourite dish, and that I am particular to have it dressed to a turn. I had taught Jimmy the art; but warned by late failures and mistakes, I called in one of the neighbours' wives to have an eye to Jimmy while dressing dinner. Well, at the hour appointed the dinner smoked on the table sure enough, and, tucking a napkin under my chin, I sat down 'richly to enjoy'; when lo! a loud scream, or rather yell, from the kitchen, startled me, and the next instant in rushed Mrs Flanagan, with outstretched arms, apparently panic-stricken.

'Oh, holy Mary! did you ait any ov it yet, sir?' she asked in breathless haste.

'Eat what?' demanded I, surprised.

'That thing in the dish,' screamed she.

'No,' said I gruffly, and angry at the unseasonable interruption.

'Nor never shall, please God,' exclaimed she, striding over, and advancing her profane hands to seize the dish, whilst I, holding it with one hand, motioned her off with the other, as I angrily desired her to leave the room, and leave me to my meal in peace.

'Never, by the hob!' exclaimed the determined vixen; 'I'll never quit till I get that thing in the dish; and here I'll stay'—and there she staid in audacious determination. My mind began to misgive me that there was something the matter with what I was so pertinaciously defending; so I raised the cover of the dish. There lay a substance black as the ace of spades. 'So, so!' I began, 'here is a fine morsel for a hungry man!—here's frying with a vengeance! Woman, woman!' cried I solemnly, and turning to my obtrusive companion with the dignity of a man who had received a mortal affront, but who yet had some feeling of God-like charity—'Woman, woman! is there never to be any dependence on your sex? I am wasted to a thread; I am worked to a skeleton; and I think this carcass hath need of a little indulgence on one day out of seven. I pay sixpence a pound for a tender, delicate rump-steak, and I call you in to superintend the dressing of it, decidedly telling you to have it done the colour of your own skin,

and no darker (dark enough in all conscience). But here it is now—neither Bedford-brown, Vandyke-brown, Adelaide-brown, nor Flanagan-brown, but a sapless, fatless, cinder black! Nevertheless, such is my resignation under all trials, I shall endeavour to make a meal of it, if possible: do you but leave me in peace—vanish! and I muttered some words in Latin, and gave two or three figurative flourishes with my hands, by way of letting her think I was performing some important ceremony of the church, at which her absence would be necessary. But she stuck fast.

‘Why, thin, indeed, sur,’ she persisted, ‘if you war to praich Latin an’ Greek from this till mornin’, you’ll never convart an ould black wisted stockin’ into a beef-staik!’

‘A what, woman, in the name of heaven!’

‘I said it, sur—a black wisted stockin’ into a beef-staik.’

I stuck my fork into the black substance plentifully covered with onion and gravy. I held it up: it was long, and, like Italy, shaped like a boot; and however it might appertain to the leg, it had nothing whatever to do with the rump-steak I had bought in the morning.

‘Ay,’ sighs Mrs Flanagan sentimentally, ‘sitch things comes ov love an’ larnin’! I was mendin’ a pair ov yer reverence’s black stockings at the kitchen-table, where Jimmy was dhressin’ the dinner. One of the workmen called me out in a hurry, an’ I threw the stockin’ out of my hands upon the table: it fell upon the dish. Jimmy turned his head about for a minnit, and the dog snapped up the mait, an’ carried it off. When Jimmy looked round agin, he seen a black thing lyin’ on the dish, an’ the crathur’s eyes, bein’ blinded with this same love an’ larnin’, he pours the gravy on the top ov it, an’ carries it off to table. So there’s the explanation.’

I still held up the black stocking on the point of my fork: I gazed on it in silence: but the blood was boiling in my veins, and I was on the eve of righteously overwhelming all that had animal life near me with a fearful burst of volcanic passion, when my frenzied eye caught a glimpse of a face at the half-opened door. It was a side-face: the mouth and chin had dropped as if in death, the goggle eyes were fixed and upturned in all the rigidity of despair—not drops, but streams of perspiration ran down the pallid jaws: motion seemed annihilated, the senses defunct; and one loud, angry word would have been a cannon-ball through the heart of poor Jimmy, had not Mercy or Momus tickled my risibilities at the critical moment, and a long, loud burst of irrepressible laughter closed the scene, and saved his life! At the first burst the delinquent fell on his knees, clasped his hands together, and looked imploringly at me, and in that humble posture remained till I got breath to say ‘I forgive you.’

Now, my friend, tell me can flesh and blood, especially dedicated to the service of the church, put up with such treatment long? Impossible. In addition to my fastings and mortifications on principle, is it not the deuce to be obliged to fast for folly? I have played many a trick on Jimmy, but he is ever more than even with me. I can get no good of him. But this I am resolved on: come weal come woe, Jimmy Delany and Betsy Kelly shall be man and wife on Monday next, and I bespeak your company at the wedding.”

“Agreed; and I think, reverend Father, this is the very best idea that has been struck out by you, or JIMMY DELANY.”

M. G. R.

THE COMMON BADGER.

Of all the animals with which man has become acquainted, and over which he has succeeded in establishing his dominion, none have had greater cause to deprecate his tyranny, and to exclaim, had they the gift of speech, against his wanton barbarity, than the unfortunate creature whose simple and unoffending habits I have selected for the subject of the present paper.

With the appearance and form of this animal most of my readers are doubtless tolerably acquainted, as it is a pretty common inhabitant of this country, and would be still more abundant, were not its numbers checked by that barbarous and brutal amusement, badger-baiting, to which, despite the interference of the laws, hundreds yearly fall victims. In general appearance as well as internal structure the badger approximates closely to the bear, and may, I think not unaptly, be regarded as the existing representative of that once formidable denizen of the wilds of our native land. Like the bear, the badger walks upon his heels, and his legs being very short, and his hair remarkably thick and long, his belly appears almost to touch the ground; a little observation is how-

ever sufficient to show that it does not actually do so. He is a nocturnal animal, that is to say, he sleeps during the day, and at the approach of evening leaves his habitation in search of food; yet nocturnal though his habits, and however closely he may in that respect resemble the predacious tribes, the food of the badger is of such a description that its appropriation injures no one, but is on the contrary productive of great benefit to the agriculturist, consisting as it does chiefly, if not solely, of roots and reptiles, as frogs, worms, grubs, beetles, &c. The badger is, as far as I have been able to discover, monogamous, lives affectionately with his mate and little ones in his secluded burrow, and in his deportment to them displays feelings of ardent devotion and disinterested attachment which many of this poor creature’s biped persecutors would do well to imitate.

The common badger is about as large as a middle-sized dog, from two feet to two feet and a half in length, exclusive of the tail, and about a foot or fifteen inches high. He weighs from twenty to thirty-five pounds, sometimes even more—I saw a badger in Edinburgh about six years ago which weighed forty-seven pounds; such a growth is however very rarely attained. In coat the badger presents a remarkable peculiarity. Among nearly all mammiferous animals the dorsal region of the body is of a darker or deeper colour than the under parts, or ventral region. The colour of the badger is on the contrary greyish above and black underneath. The fur of the badger is thick, rough, and by no means glossy; the skin, with the hair on, is dressed and manufactured into pistol cases. The skin of the head and face may be frequently seen forming the “sporrán” or purse which depends from the girdle of the Scottish highlander; and the hairs of the tail are in great request for the manufacture of paint and lather brushes. The badger is an inhabitant of all the temperate parts of Europe and Asia. In Great Britain and France it is scarcer, from the assiduity with which it is hunted and destroyed. Doctor Richardson has identified various new species in his account of the zoology of the arctic regions. As the object of the present paper is however a sketch of the European animal, I shall not notice any other at present, but merely refer such of my friends as may feel curious on the subject, to Doctor Richardson’s splendid work entitled “Fauna Boreali Americana.”

In its internal conformation the badger presents two remarkable features, namely, in the first place a peculiar formation of jaws, which not merely enables him to retain a firm hold of whatever object he seizes with his teeth, but absolutely lock in such a manner, that he himself does not always possess the power of instantaneously unclosing them; and, secondly, a pouch or bag placed just below the tail, whence exudes a thick and fetid substance. It is upon this that the strong smell given forth by this animal depends.

I had once a badger in my own possession, and the study of his habits afforded me much interest and gratification. He was more than half grown when I obtained possession of him, and I can assure my readers that the task of taming him was no sinecure. The first agent I employed for effecting his domestication was hunger. I kept him fasting for three whole days, allowing him only a little water in his bowl, which humanity would not suffer me to deny him. Starvation, however, did not produce any immediate good effects, and the animal remained as fierce and irreconcilable as ever. It would but needlessly occupy the readers’ time were I minutely to recount the process of taming him; let it suffice to refer them to my late papers in this Journal on the taming of animals. I followed the rules therein laid down, and I had the satisfaction of finding them ultimately successful, after from six to eight months of anxious care, enlivened occasionally by the variety of a severe bite, a casualty for which every practical zoologist must be prepared, and at which it would be ridiculous for him to grumble. I have only to observe, that were any one to present me with a hundred pounds for the mark of every gash received by its teeth, of which the scars still remain on my hands and legs, I should be tolerably rich.

After about eight months, however, he gave up his practice of constantly biting when attempted to be handled, unless under great provocation or excitement, and was not merely so gentle as to be with safety indulged with partial liberty, but would come and go when I called him or drove him from me, would feed from my hand or mount upon my knee, and was, moreover, soon afterwards entrusted with entire liberty without any danger of his running away. He was a very cleanly creature, carefully scraping into one end of his cage whatever unpleasant matters might collect in it, and he always contri-